WWIA News Summer 2021



Hello, everyone. Thanks to all of you who maintained your memberships and paid your dues during the year of no programming. Now that things are opening up, our goal is to provide you once again with programs that inform and entertain. I look forward to seeing you all soon.

We held our first in-person meeting since March 2020 at the open-air pavilion behind WCD's J. Roy Houston Conservation Center on June 17. Forester Michael Doucette gave us the knowledge we need to deal with the invasive spotted lanternfly, which has been seen in Westmoreland County. We had a good turnout.

The officers and directors will be having a board meeting this month to take care of business items and plan for programming for fall 2021 and into 2022. We're working on plans for a program in September and the annual business meeting, with a speaker, in October.

We're in discussion with the The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to have one of their experts talk about the Family Forest Carbon Capture Program, which has expanded to our southwest PA region.

The October meeting will include the annual potluck dinner, as well as a business meeting that features the delayed biennial elections for officers and voting directors.

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President's Message (cont'd)

WWIA's mission is to encourage good management of woodlands for aesthetics, timber, water quality and control, wildlife habitat, plant propagation, and recreation. Please check <u>westmorelandwoodlands.org</u> for the latest information about program times and places.

Recap of Spotted Lanternfly Talk By John Hilewick

On the evening of June 17 at the WCD pavilion, WWIA members celebrated our first in-person meeting in 15 months with a wonderful presentation by Michael Doucette, a service forester who recently began working out of the PA Bureau of Forestry Forbes District office in Laughlintown.

Michael came to DCNR BOF after leaving the PA Department of Agriculture. Before that, he worked for New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation. He is a graduate of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and the SUNY ESF Ranger School.

His presentation centered on the invasive spotted lanternfly. This very destructive bug has made its way into Westmoreland County from the eastern regions of the state. Michael taught us what steps we can take as woodland owners to mitigate this pest and to avoid its spread.

He provided many handouts of informational literature and discussed methods to slow down the insects' spread and reduce any populations you encounter on your property: for example, removing their preferred host (tree of heaven), applying insecticides, and using circle traps.

He led a short field trip into Anne Saxman Nature Park and demonstrated the foliar method of applying pesticide and the basal-bark hack-and-squirt method of applying herbicide on the two trees of heaven he had located on the property. He stressed that in hack and squirt, you don't want to girdle the tree. It has to stay alive long enough to transport the herbicide to the root. This demonstration substituted water for the herbicide solution.

Michael explained how SLFs made their way to southwestern PA so quickly. They hitchhike on trucks, cars, and railcars. They've been found at Twin Lakes and near the railroad depot in Latrobe. Extensive railway networks make railcars major vectors for SLFs' spread. There is a substantial presence of tree of heaven along many railroad tracks, as well as in many other areas of our region.

If SLFs do attempt to colonize your property, destroying the egg masses you find on your vehicles or trees is an effective way to slow them down.

As I see it, this bad-bug battle is going to be a long and difficult one. In the not-toodistant future, scientists may identify biological intercessions that can be applied, not unlike the parasitic wasps and Bt (bacillus thuringiensis) used to combat another Asian invasive pest, the gypsy moth.

Gypsy Moth Is Making a Comeback

By Robert Lusk, PA DCNR, rlusk@pa.gov, 717-514-6703



Photo 1. Gypsy moth defoliation on oak trees. All photos by Jim Altemus



Photo 2 Mature gypsy moth caterpillar.

Have you noticed your oak leaves being munched this year? Your woods may be infested with gypsy moth, which has been a forest pest of note since its introduction to the United States in the late 1800s. While gypsy moth prefers to feed on oaks, it is also known to feed on a variety of other species, especially if oak is scarce or if caterpillar populations are high.

One defoliation by gypsy moth doesn't typically lead to mortality, but it can if the tree is already stressed. Repeated defoliation by gypsy moth will kill the tree.

If you've noticed a disappearance of leaves from your oak trees this spring and early summer, keep an eye out for the mature gypsy moth caterpillar (Photo 2). In late spring, the gypsy moth will either be in that final caterpillar stage or have transitioned to the pupal stage of its life.



Photo 3 Gypsy moth pupa.

After gypsy moths emerge from their pupa as moths they mate. The females lay eggs in a large brown mass. These egg

masses begin to appear in late July and August. They are what insect and disease foresters survey to predict the population level of gypsy moth the following spring/summer.

Keep an eye on your trees and other outdoor surfaces for these egg masses throughout the year! As the leaves begin to fall, egg masses in the upper canopy will become visible.

If you are seeing an abundance of egg masses and are concerned about the health of your trees, contact an expert to discuss possible treatment options.



Photo 4 A female gypsy moth lays an egg mass.

Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest by Suzanne Simard

Reviewed by Judith Gallagher

This book is a hybrid: a detailed account of scientific experiments, a memoir, and a spiritual and psychological journey.

Have you heard of the wood-wide web? Suzanne Simard's experiments, confirming what indigenous peoples have known for millennia, proved that trees can communicate and send each other nutrients through underground networks of fungi.

Simard has spent her life in the woods. She grew up in British Columbia in a family who had logged for generations. After forestry school, she got a job on a Douglas fir plantation in the 1980s.

When she surveyed the acres of fir seedlings her company had planted to replace the old-growth forest they had cut down, they were barely alive. Yet wild firs germinating outside the plantation were thriving. She pulled up some plantation seedlings and saw that they weren't sprouting any new roots. By contrast, the wild seedlings had healthy root systems with bright-yellow fungal threads wrapped around the root tips.

Industry policy was to exterminate the leafy plants and broadleaf trees that it saw as competitors to cash crops of Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, and spruce. But Simard found the plants' relationships were cooperative too. Alders added nitrogen to the soil to boost the conifer seedlings' growth. Pinegrass shaded new germinants, which otherwise baked in the sun. Rhododendrons protected seedlings from hard frosts.

Simard ran one lengthy experiment showing that conifer seedlings needed to connect with the mycorrhizal fungi in soil to survive. Then she ran another that showed native plants helped them make that connection.

She documented her findings that carbon flows through the hyphae of fungi between trees and even between species. The journal *Nature* published her article as its cover story in August 1997.

After taking a job as a silviculture researcher with the Canadian Forest Service, she designed and carried out hundreds of experiments at numerous sites. She found repeatedly that lowered biodiversity reduced the productivity of cash-crop trees and increased the risk of poor health and wildfires.

Her findings were quite controversial, but the science was rigorous, peer-reviewed, and widely published. It proved, she writes, that "trees are in a web of interdependence, linked

If you want to be part of a citizen-science initiative to save the world's forests, learn more at http://mothertreeproject.org.

Finding the Mother Tree (cont'd)

by a system of underground channels where they perceive and connect and relate with an ancient intricacy and wisdom that can no longer be denied."

The author weaves together her experiences in woods and labs with her personal life. She talks about how shy she was as a young forester and how dismissed because she was a woman, how difficult it was to present her findings to hostile audiences from government and industry. But having children made her "fiercer and bolder," she says, more determined to protect the forests for future generations.

Breast cancer forced Simard to concentrate her work in the lab instead of the rugged forests for a while. She suspected her long-term exposures to glyphosate and carbon-14 were contributing causes. She found solace in being treated with paclitaxel, a chemo drug derived from the cambium of yew trees.

In 40 years of boots-on-the-ground forestry work and labwork, Simard proved that the fungal network connects all the trees in a forest. The old trees nurture the seedlings.

"When Mother Trees—the majestic hubs at the center of forest communication, protection, and sentience—die, they pass their wisdom to their kin, sharing the knowledge of what helps and what harms, who is friend or foe, and how to adapt and survive in an ever-changing landscape," she writes.

If you care about trees, this book will expand your knowledge and give you hope.

Showcase a Resource: Westmoreland Land Trust

Betsy Aiken, Executive Director, Westmoreland Land Trust

The Westmoreland Land Trust (WLT) is a nonprofit charitable organization that was formed by the Westmoreland County Commissioners in December 2007. Although formed by Westmoreland County, the WLT is an autonomous body governed by a large Board of Directors. Westmoreland County has the opportunity to appoint two of these directors.

The WLT's mission is "to conserve and steward lands and waters of Westmoreland County that harbor ecological, scenic or recreational qualities to offer a healthier and more sustainable future for all."

The WLT is staffed by executive director Betsy Aiken and AmeriCorps service member Loree Speedy.

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association's field trips and lectures are a valuable resource to the WLT and to



Showcase a Resource (cont'd)

owners and stewards of woodlands in Westmoreland County. Before the pandemic curtailed programming, the WLT partnered with WWIA in 2019 and 2018 to jointly host autumn walks in Penn's Woods at the Otto and Magdalene Ackermann Nature Preserve.

John Hilewick and Tony Quadro from WWIA very kindly contributed "tree cookies" to a WLT anniversary celebration. Fred Lau has provided valuable historical information about the area of the Ackermann Preserve.

Fred also suggested the name "Blue Dell Run" for the tributary to Brush Creek that runs through the Ackermann Preserve (as well as through his property), recognizing the



Tree cookies

headwater spring that also provided the water for the former Blue Dell Pool.

The WLT went on to officially secure that name from the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

The WLT highly values



the work of WWIA and its members to improve the quality of woodlots and confront ecological challenges such as deer pressure, invasive plants, and various tree ailments. For landowners who wish to consider permanently

conserving their land, the WLT can help by providing information about possibilities and resources. Conserving one's land is a profound legacy for future generations.

The WLT conserves land through fee-simple acquisition by accepting donation of land or by purchasing land, possibly at a bargain price. Another possible way to conserve land is via an agreement (a conservation easement) with the landowner(s) that permanently limits their use of all or part of the land in order to protect its conservation values. At this time, the WLT has not entered into any conservation easements.

When considering a new project, the WLT carefully evaluates the conservation value of the land, the capacity of the WLT, resources available, and the cost and effort of the project. The WLT also carefully considers the degree of public benefit associated with a potential project. Public benefit may be derived from the land's ecological, historic, scenic, or recreational value.

More information about the WLT's work is available at <u>westmoreland-landtrust.org</u> and on the WLT's <u>Facebook page</u>. Requests for information and inquiries are welcome and invited. Please email <u>westmorelandlandtrust@gmail.com</u> or call 724-325-3031.

Species Spotlight: Red Maple Acer rubrum

Celine Colbert, Forester, Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of Forestry

Perhaps the greatest strength of the red maple is its unique ability to toe the center line. The most common tree species in Pennsylvania, the red maple can be found anywhere from streamside to ridgetop. Its wood value is comfortably near the average for our Pennsylvania species. It can thrive in full sun to part shade. It grows faster than sugar maple but not as



fast as silver maple. The list of its ordinary qualities can go on and on. Red maple bark can be distinguished from our native sugar and silver maple by its Vshaped, serrated grooves. When red maple trees are young, their light-

grey bark is smooth and thin, but as they age the bark breaks up and becomes flaky enough that you can pick off a piece or two. It's not uncommon to see green lichens coating the bark, but they do not harm the trees.

Red maple has been bred into a variety of cultivars and crossed with other maples to achieve a vast range of shapes, sizes, and fall leaf colors. These cultivars are generally very adaptable and hardy, but because of this they are often overplanted, collectively comprising the largest percentage of many community forests.

Experts at adaptability, red maple trees span the length of the eastern United States from Maine to Florida. In the southern part of their range, the trees favor wet areas and are commonly referred to as swamp maples.

Though we may sometimes overlook red maple as being a perfectly average tree, its very averageness may be the advantage that allows it to dominate our eastern forests.

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Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

Membership Application and Renewal – Dues \$10 per year

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